



Less commonly taught languages at EUROCALL: what has changed over the years?

Monica Ward¹

Abstract. The world of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is dominated by English, and to a lesser extent, French, Spanish, and German. While these languages are the main focus of EUROCALL conferences, there has always been a presence of Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) at these conferences. Most of the official languages of the EU and European languages more generally have been discussed by CALL researchers at EUROCALL conferences, but some languages have yet to make an appearance. There have also been presentations on other LCTLs outside of Europe, including Mandarin, Arabic, Japanese, and less widely spoken languages such as Thai and Nahuatl. This paper looks at the presence of LCTLs at EUROCALL conferences since 1993 and reflects on what has changed over the years. It notes the importance of the conference location on the languages discussed at the conference and the role of EU projects in supporting LCTLs.

Keywords: less commonly taught languages, CALL, EUROCALL.

1. Introduction

The *Ethnologue* (2021) estimates that there are over 7,000 languages in the world, ranging from widely spoken languages such as Mandarin, English, and Spanish to less commonly spoken languages like Czech and Greek, and endangered languages like Karaim and Erromintxela. There are 24 official languages of the European Union (EU, 2020) but there are many other official, regional, minority, and endangered languages spoken across Europe. EUROCALL is the European association for CALL and a multilingual Europe is important for EUROCALL (Chesters, 1999; Kingscott, 1996). Languages from other parts of the world have made appearances at EUROCALL conferences. EUROCALL gatherings took

1. Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland; monica.ward@dcu.ie

How to cite this article: Ward, M. (2021). Less commonly taught languages at EUROCALL: what has changed over the years? In N. Zoghalmi, C. Brudermann, C. Sarré, M. Grosbois, L. Bradley, & S. Thouéšny (Eds), *CALL and professionalisation: short papers from EUROCALL 2021* (pp. 285-289). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2021.54.1347>

place before 1993 (Davies, 2001) and have been hosted in 17 different countries, including majority speaking LCTLs. The list of conferences is available from the EUROCALL past conferences website (EUROCALL, 2021a).

This paper looks at LCTLs at EUROCALL since the early days of CALL, with a focus on papers since 2012 and explores what trends have emerged. The term LCTL has other related but different terms, such as less widely used languages, minority languages, heritage languages in some, but not all, contexts, amongst others (see Ward, 2018 for details). As the name suggests, LCTL refers to languages that have fewer students than other languages. It does not refer to the number of L1 speakers of the language, nor is it a reflection of the importance, intrinsic beauty, or difficulty of the language. The term is also relative and depends on location. For example, Japanese is an LCTL in Europe, but not so in Asia – see Ostler and Reyhner (2002) and Ward (2018) for more details on LCTLs.

Unsurprisingly, the focus at EUROCALL conferences has been the Most Commonly Taught Languages (MCTLs) – English, Spanish, French, and German. There are fewer L2 learners of other European languages, but this situation can change. For example, until recently, Swedish would have been mainly studied as an L2 in other Nordic countries only. However, the arrival of migrants to the country in recent years who do not speak English has meant that there is a need for general language and CALL resources for Swedish (Lindström, Hashemi, Bartram, & Bradley, 2017).

2. Method

Information on each EUROCALL conference from 1993 to 2021 was reviewed to determine which languages were discussed in an L2 context at the conference. This paper only reviews papers from 2012-2020 as the information is more comprehensive than for pre-2012 conferences. From 2012, selected papers were published by Research-publishing.net and links are available on the EUROCALL conference short papers site (EUROCALL, 2021b). This short review of the presence of LCTLs at EUROCALL does not refer to all languages presented at each EUROCALL conference – only those reported in the short papers publications. There have been presentations on LCTLs (2012-2020) but no corresponding accounts were written for the short paper proceedings.

In some cases, the language being studied was explicitly stated in the abstract, in other cases it was not stated. If the language was not stated but the paper referred

to students in a non-English speaking country (e.g. Japan), English was assumed to be the L2. If a specific approach was being described (e.g. MALL), the (naïve) assumption was language independence. For this paper for simplicity purposes, a LCTL is defined as a European language other than English, French, German, and Spanish, while noting the presence of other LCTLs from other continents.

3. Results and discussion

Presentations featuring Spanish, French, and German can be found at almost all EUROCALL conferences. Table 1 shows a list of LCTLs reported on in EUROCALL conferences short papers from 2012-2020.

Table 1. List of LCTLs reported in EUROCALL short papers 2012-2020

Year	Location	Home L1	LCTLs	Comment
2012	Sweden	Yes	Greek, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, Swedish, Welsh	Other: Arabic, Chinese
2013	Portugal	Yes	Italian, Swedish, Portuguese	Other: Chinese, Igbo Note: special interest group for Portuguese teachers in Portuguese
2014	Netherlands	Yes	Albanian, Catalan, Estonian, Irish, Polish, Russian	
2015	Italy	Yes	Danish, Dutch, Greek, Icelandic, Irish, Russian	Other: LCTL mentioned EU project: TLC
2016	Cyprus	Yes	Croatian, Finnish, Greek, Icelandic, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Turkish	Other: Arabic, Nahuatl, Nawat Note: LCTL special interest group formed
2017	UK	Yes	Finnish, Irish, Italian, Polish	Other: Japanese Note: LCTL workshop
2018	Finland	Yes	Finnish, Irish	Other: Japanese, Korean Note: LCTL symposium
2019	Belgium	Yes	Ancient Greek, Dutch, Finnish, Icelandic, Irish, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Slavic, Slovak, Swedish	Other: Chinese; LCTL mentioned Note: LCTL symposium
2020	Denmark	No	Estonian, Finnish, Finish Sign Language, Icelandic, Italian, Old Norse, Portuguese, Russian	Other: Japanese, Korean Note: LCTL symposium; EU project: iRead

There are two main themes from this analysis of past EUROCALL conferences. The first is that the location of the conference has an impact on which LCTL languages are spoken about at the conference; Swedish, Finnish, and other Nordic languages at conferences in the Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland, Denmark) and Greek and Turkish at the conference in Cyprus (2016). The only recent exception is Danish, which was not reported on in 2020 (but this may be partly Covid-19 related). The 2018 conference had a LCTL symposium at which several LCTLs were discussed, but not reported on in the short papers. The second observation is that many LCTLs have a presence at EUROCALL conferences as they are part of a larger EU project. The languages are sometimes mentioned only in the context of the project, rather than standalone presentations on the language itself – e.g. Dutch in the context of the TLC project (Oberhofer & Colpaert, 2015).

Reflecting on changes, English, Spanish, French, and German continue to be the languages with the most focus, but there are usually at least a few presentations on LCTLs at each conference. There are many reasons why LCTLs have a limited presence at EUROCALL, including the fact that less students study them and LCTL teachers may work in precarious positions and may have CALL skills. The LCTL special interest group was formed at the 2016 conference in Cyprus. A group of EUROCALL members working with LCTLs recognised the need for CALL researchers to work together on common problems and to share knowledge and expertise. There have been LCTL symposiums at EUROCALL since then and this has provided a forum for LCTL CALL researchers to learn from each other. The special interest group also has contacts with CALICO members and this is mutually beneficial for both parties. A final observation is that holding a EUROCALL conference at a location where there are LCTLs spoken provides an opportunity for LCTL CALL researchers to present their work.

4. Conclusions

There has been great variety among the languages discussed at EUROCALL conferences. Almost all of the official languages of the EU have had a presence (including at pre-2012 conferences), with the possible exception of Bulgarian, Maltese, Latvian, and Slovenian. Other non-EU European languages have appeared at EUROCALL conferences as well as languages from other parts of the world, most notably Japanese and Mandarin (referred to as Chinese in the short papers). It is worthwhile and important for EUROCALL to continue to provide a welcoming environment for LCTLs at its conferences.

5. Acknowledgements

The author welcomes corrections, particularly if a language is missing from [Table 1](#).

References

- Chesters, G. (1999). On the politics of CALL. *ReCALL*, 11(1), 7-12. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344000002032>
- Davies, G. (2001). *History of EUROCALL*. <https://www.eurocall-languages.org/about/history>
- Ethnologue. (2021). *Ethnologue: languages of the world*. <https://www.ethnologue.com/guides/how-many-languages>
- EU. (2020). *European Union official languages*. https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-languages_en
- EUROCALL. (2021a). *Past conferences*. <https://www.eurocall-languages.org/conferences/past-conferences>
- EUROCALL. (2021b). *Conference short papers*. <https://www.eurocall-languages.org/publications/conference-proceedings>
- Kingscott, G. (1996). The impact of technology and the implications for teaching. *Teaching Translation and Interpreting* 3. John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.16.38kin>
- Lindström, N. B., Hashemi, S. S., Bartram, L., & Bradley, L. (2017). Mobile resources for integration: how availability meets the needs of newly arrived Arabic-speaking migrants in Sweden. In K. Borthwick, L. Bradley & S. Thouësny (Eds), *CALL in a climate of change: adapting to turbulent global conditions – short papers from EUROCALL 2017* (pp. 40-45). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2017.eurocall2017.686>
- Oberhofer, M., & Colpaert, J. (2015). TLC Pack unpacked. In F. Helm, L. Bradley, M. Guarda, & S. Thouësny (Eds), *Critical CALL – proceedings of the 2015 EUROCALL conference, Padova, Italy* (pp. 439-443). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2015.000372>
- Ostler, N., & Reyhner, J. (2002). From the special issue editors. *Language Learning & Technology*, 6(2), 2-3. <https://doi.org/10.125/25151>
- Ward, M. (2018). Qualitative research in less commonly taught and endangered language CALL. *Language Learning & Technology*, 22(2), 116-132. <https://doi.org/10.125/44639>

Published by Research-publishing.net, a not-for-profit association
Contact: info@research-publishing.net

© 2021 by Editors (collective work)
© 2021 by Authors (individual work)

CALL and professionalisation: short papers from EUROCALL 2021

Edited by Naouel Zoghلامي, Cédric Bruder mann, Cedric Sarré, Muriel Grosbois, Linda Bradley, and Sylvie Thoučšny

Publication date: 2021/12/13

Rights: the whole volume is published under the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives International (CC BY-NC-ND) licence; **individual articles may have a different licence.** Under the CC BY-NC-ND licence, the volume is freely available online (<https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2021.54.9782490057979>) for anybody to read, download, copy, and redistribute provided that the author(s), editorial team, and publisher are properly cited. Commercial use and derivative works are, however, not permitted.

Disclaimer: Research-publishing.net does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this book. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before, or that it was not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the information in this book is believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither the editorial team nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions. The publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein. While Research-publishing.net is committed to publishing works of integrity, the words are the authors' alone.

Trademark notice: product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Copyrighted material: every effort has been made by the editorial team to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material in this book. In the event of errors or omissions, please notify the publisher of any corrections that will need to be incorporated in future editions of this book.

Typeset by Research-publishing.net

Cover Theme by © 2021 DIRCOM CNAM; Graphiste : Thomas Veniant
Cover Photo by © 2021 Léo Andres, Sorbonne Université
Cover Photo by © 2021 Sandrine Villain, Le Cnam
Cover Layout by © 2021 Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)

Fonts used are licensed under a SIL Open Font License

ISBN13: 978-2-490057-97-9 (PDF, colour)

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit, France: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: décembre 2021.